

Gregory Thaumaturgus

A Platonic Lawgiver

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Gregory of Nyssa's attitudes toward classical culture, his vision for the episcopate, and his role as a self-conscious participant in the foundation and promotion of saintly cults all come to the fore in his *Life* of Gregory the Thaumaturge—the student of Origen, the so-called Apostle to Pontus, and the first bishop of Neocaesarea.¹ Born to a wealthy family in Pontus around 210–15 CE, Gregory the Thaumaturge received a standard rhetorical education and was destined for a career in the courts or the imperial administration.² He was apparently set to pursue a course in Beirut's famous

legal school, but turned instead to Caesarea in Palestine to study under the great Christian philosopher and exegete Origen. Upon returning home he was made bishop of Neocaesarea, and he is said to have presided at first over a community of only seventeen Christians. He seems to have been largely responsible for the Christianization of the region, and Gregory of Nyssa writes that at his death he left only seventeen pagans still to be converted in Neocaesarea (95.8).

The *Life*'s popularity spread in subsequent centuries after its translation into Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian.³ Its account of the Thaumaturge's conversion of Pontus has been an important if problematic source for modern studies of the process of Christianization, particularly the conversion of eastern Anatolia.⁴ Today it is widely acknowledged that many of the episodes of the *Life* are the invention of Gregory of Nyssa himself. Furthermore, it has been

1 For the text of the *Life*, I use throughout the section and line numbers of Pierre Maraval's Sources Chrétiennes edition and translation: *Grégoire de Nyssse: Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge, Éloge de Basile* (Paris, 2014), hereafter cited as "Maraval." In it he prints Günther Heil's text from G. Heil, J. Cavarinos, and O. Lendle, eds., *Gregorii Nysseni Sermones Pars II, Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 10.2 (Leiden, 1990). For an English translation of the *Life* as well as of the Thaumaturge's own works, see M. Slusser, trans., *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works* (Washington, DC, 1998). Translations throughout this essay are my own. To avoid confusion, I refer to Gregory the Thaumaturge as "the Thaumaturge," while "Gregory" is used to refer only to Gregory of Nyssa.

2 For an outline of the Thaumaturge's life and works, see Slusser, *St. Gregory*, 1–8. For major studies of the *Life* and the issues involved in approaching it as a historical source, see R. Van Dam, "Hagiography and History: The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus," *Classical Antiquity* 1, no. 2 (1982): 272–308, and S. Mitchell, "The Life and Lives of Gregory Thaumaturgus," in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium, and the Christian Orient*, ed. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (Leiden, 1999), 99–138.

3 For the translations of the *Life*, see Mitchell, "The Life and Lives," 116–19, and Maraval, 40–45. Mitchell argues that the Latin translator was none other than Rufinus of Aquileia himself (134), and he follows P. Koetschau ("Zur Lebensgeschichte Gregors des Wunderthäters," *ZWTh* 41 [1898]: 211–50) in assigning the Syriac translation to the 6th century (117). For the spread of the cult of the Wonderworker, see W. Telfer, "The Cultus of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus," *HTR* 29, no. 4 (1936): 225–344.

4 See R. Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia, 2003), 72–81, on the importance of the figure of the Thaumaturge in the Cappadocians' own narratives of conversion.

argued that Gregory had little solid historical information about his subject. He does not seem to know any of the Thaumaturge's own writings, and even constructs episodes that contradict the very testimony of his subject.⁵ Thus several historians have recognized the need to treat the *Life* as the literary text "it was originally supposed to be."⁶ To make the same point another way, the *Life* was "originally supposed to be" consumed by Gregory's sociocultural peers as an encomium adhering to certain generic conventions.⁷ Gregory seems to have performed some version of the encomium first at a *panegyris* in honor of the saint, before editing it into its current form.⁸ Regardless of whether the panegyris took place in the Thaumaturge's home bishopric of Neocaesarea or in another see such as Iborra of Helenopontus, the audience would likely have included episcopal delegations from across the region.⁹ Both Gregory's original audience and the audience of the written version would have experienced the *Life* as a text that advertised its participation in a tradition.¹⁰

5 For Gregory's lack of familiarity with the Thaumaturge's own writings, see R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1987), 528–38, as well as Van Dam, "Hagiography and History," 281, and Mitchell, "Life and Lives," 120.

6 Van Dam, "Hagiography and History," 289. Mitchell, "Life and Lives," 99, writes that outside of the creed, "the rest of [the *Life*] is largely fiction."

7 For the *Life* and the literary background of the encomium, see Maraval, 9–14, who also notes how the *Life* differs from other works of Gregory's that follow more closely the conventions of ancient biography.

8 For Gregory's subsequent redaction and expansion of the original, see Slusser, *St. Gregory*, 15–16, and Mitchell, "Life and Lives," 129–30; the latter suggests that "the impression is of a piece superficially revised after delivery" (130).

9 For the date and circumstances of its original performance, see Mitchell, "Life and Lives," 115, 127–29; Slusser, *St. Gregory*, 15–16; and Maraval, 14–23. Mitchell, 115, argues that Gregory first performed the panegyric in the fall of 379, and indeed that the panegyris for the Thaumaturge in Neocaesarea on his feast day, 17 November, was "surely the occasion for the panegyric." Both Mitchell and Maraval, who plumps however for a first performance at Iborra (22–23), suggest that an episcopal election may have accompanied the saint's panegyris. Furthermore, both draw attention to how Gregory's narrative features prominent characters drawn from several cities in the region in a way that "would have flattered the ears of appropriate sections of the audience" (Mitchell, 129).

10 In addition to the regional municipal and ecclesiastical elites that would have composed Gregory's original audience, we should also posit, as members of his readership, a network of professional or semiprofessional sophists and rhetors of the type that Neil

This holds true despite the *Life*'s declaration of independence from that literary tradition, a rhetorical move that itself is part of the game.¹¹ For Gregory and his rhetorically educated peers, the very form of the encomium, as well as any allusions deployed in a particular encomium, constituted a part of their cultural capital.¹²

In what follows I offer a reading of the *Life* that explores its allusive engagement with one text in particular: Plato's *Laws*, written by one of the authors most widely studied and imitated as a stylistic model by rhetors of the Second (and Third) Sophistic.¹³ Such a reading of the *Life* of the Thaumaturge—whom Gregory explicitly presents as a "lawgiver"—yields a series of pronouncements regarding the position of Christianity within Gregory's cultural coordinates. The *Life* offers a glimpse of how the process of Christianization—an accomplished fact for Gregory and his late fourth-century audience¹⁴—could be reimagined in such a way

McLynn has been able to demonstrate for Gregory of Nazianzus: N. McLynn, "Among the Hellenists: Gregory and the Sophists," in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. J. Børtnes and T. Hägg (Copenhagen, 2006), 213–38. For the audiences of the Cappadocians in general, see also A. Meredith, "The Three Cappadocians on Beneficence: A Key to Their Audience," in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, ed. M. Cunningham and P. Allen (Leiden, 1998), 89–104: "Of the Cappadocian audience we can say that they were probably cultivated and understood the elaborate diction they heard. The existence side by side in their homilies of motifs drawn indiscriminately from classical and Christian sources is an index of their unconscious desire to fuse the basic sources of their own education and inspiration" (103). I would argue, however, against the use of words such as "indiscriminately" and "unconscious."

11 For Gregory's disavowal of the traditional form of the encomium, see sections 4–10. Slusser, *St. Gregory*, 42 n. 2, draws attention here to the fact that "the reader will note many of these headings [sc. the traditional sections of an encomium] reflected in Gregory of Nyssa's oration."

12 See for example D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, eds., *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), xii: "these public orators of the late empire sought to demonstrate in all their works their grasp of classical literature, the canonized *biblia* which formed the staple of education."

13 Plato and Platonism in the Cappadocians is a vast topic; for a brief introduction, see now D. Bradshaw, "Plato in the Cappadocian Fathers," in *Plato in the Third Sophistic*, ed. R. Fowler (Boston, 2014), 193–210. For the reception of the *Laws* in late antiquity, see n. 42 below.

14 For how the process of Christianization could be reimagined or "explained" through hagiography, see P. van Minnen, "Saving History? Egyptian Hagiography in Its Space and Time," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86 (2006): 57–91: "By about 400, the end result, a fully Christian society in a once fully pagan

as to invoke and even challenge Platonic models, particularly with respect to the institutions of the episcopacy and martyr cult. The *Life* points also to the role played by Gregory and his similarly educated peers as representatives of both classical and Christian culture. Although the latter topic has featured prominently in scholarship on Gregory's writings, to date any possible contribution from the *Life* has remained unnoticed or obscured by the distance between the *Life*'s explicit pronouncements on pagan culture and its implicit engagement with pagan literature.¹⁵ That distance is always present in the writings of the Cappadocians, but in this case the allusive quality of much of Gregory's narrative has remained elusive indeed.

The discussion that follows presents a series of passages in Gregory's *Life* that bear some degree of textual resemblance to various moments in the *Laws*. Once we recognize these correspondences, we are immediately confronted with the task of making sense of them—that is, creating meaning from them. In the face of the methodological problems that this effort entails, especially with respect to the relationship between intertextuality in the *Life* and the “intent” of its author, Gregory of Nyssa, it will be helpful to look to the response of the reader, a move articulated by Tim Whitmarsh in his analysis of Philostratus's *Heroicus*:

Few scholars, of course, are comfortable with the romantic expression of authorial consciousness, but in truth the cognitive process of reading almost always involves hypothesizing some kind of intelligent design supporting the text, a unifying principle or set of principles

(whether we attribute these to the author or, in the modish language of much criticism, to “the text”). . . . I take this “intention” not as a presence latent in the text but as a (necessary) con-fabulation generated by the reading process.¹⁶

The passages in which we recognize the language of Plato's *Laws* in the unlikely setting of a saint's biography encourage us to hypothesize “an authorial surrogate”¹⁷ behind those moments of textual reanimation. Simultaneously, they encourage us to look for “a unifying principle” that would make sense of their presence. In what follows it will often prove expedient to attribute such principles to the authorial activity of Gregory of Nyssa himself, but this attribution should be seen as merely a necessary shorthand for referring to the figure that we as readers make coalesce around the *Life*'s narrator during the act of reading itself.

We begin with two major episodes that appear, respectively, toward the beginning and the end of Gregory's account of the Thaumaturge's “missionary” activities in Pontus:¹⁸ his first appearance as a holy figure in Neocaesarea after his return from Origen's school in Palestine (22.1–24.24) and his institution of commemorative festivals in honor of the martyrs of the Decian persecution (94.1–27).

It is in these passages that the author's own role as a participant and observer of the process of cult formation—not to mention his training in rhetoric and philosophy—comes to the fore. Gregory's description of the Thaumaturge's activities in both of these episodes is based on passages from Plato's *Laws*. When the Thaumaturge returns home from his studies abroad, Gregory casts him in the guise of the Platonic lawgiver (νομοθέτης) and sacred observer (θεωρός) by drawing on Plato's depiction of the ideal lawgiver and community in the *Laws*.¹⁹ When the Thaumaturge “legislates” martyr festivals (πανηγύρεις νομοθετήσας, 94.7–8), he acts in accordance with the *Laws*' discussion of the

environment, had to be explained somehow, and hagiography provided an answer” (59). I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for this reference.

15 I am indebted here to Ihor Ševčenko's formulation in “A Shadow Outline of Virtue: The Classical Heritage of Greek Christian Literature (Second to Seventh Century),” in *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. K. Weitzmann (New York, 1980), 53–73 (repr. in *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World* [London, 1982]). Regarding the Cappadocian fathers, he calls attention to “the discrepancy between their literary practice and their theoretical pronouncements on literature,” noting that “the former is all of a piece; the latter are ambivalent. The fathers speak out of both sides of their mouths” (60). For the theme of Gregory and his position between classical and Christian culture, see for example E. Muchlberger, “Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural Reclamation,” *ChHist* 81, no. 2 (2012): 273–97.

16 T. Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Greek Postclassicism* (Berkeley, 2013), 102.

17 Ibid.

18 See Van Dam, “Hagiography and History,” 274–75, who calls attention to the anachronisms involved in describing the Thaumaturge's activities as “missionary” work.

19 For the cultural background of the figure of Plato's *theoros*, see I. Rutherford, *State Pilgrims and Sacred Observers in Ancient Greece: A Study of Theōriā and Theōroi* (Cambridge, 2013).

role of festivals in an idealized education. It is a recurring theme in modern scholarship on the *Life* that it tells us just as much about fourth-century Cappadocia as it does about third-century Pontus.²⁰ In this case, Gregory's engagement with the *Laws* shows us how the language of Plato could be harnessed by a fourth-century philosopher-rhetor to articulate the ways in which late antique phenomena, like the Holy Man and martyr festivals, perform their social roles.

1. The *Laws* and Models of *Theoria*

We begin with the Thaumaturge's journey to Palestine to pursue his studies and his subsequent return to Neocaesarea in Pontus. Having already completed his education in classical subjects (which Gregory characteristically calls the "outer wisdom," 22.1), the Thaumaturge meets a fellow Christian named Firmilianus and travels together with him to study with Origen. Gregory describes the latter as being the pre-eminent figure in Christian philosophy at the time, and at his side the Thaumaturge proves an excellent student and learns "divine" lessons (22.15). The Thaumaturge returns to Neocaesarea "laden with the wealth of wisdom and knowledge," as if he were a "merchant in external studies" who had plied his trade in association with all those of high repute (23.20–23). As such he is entreated by the leading figures of the community (who, we should remember, are not yet Christian) to stay among them and become a "chartering founder of virtue and a lawgiver of life" (οἰκιστὴν ἀρετῆς καὶ βίου νομοθέτην, 23.30). To the surprise of the local worthies, the Thaumaturge refuses and goes off on his own in pursuit of the contemplative life. The citizens had expected him to give demonstrations of his learning in common assemblies, since he would thereby reap a good reputation as the fruit of his long toils (24.4–8). But the Thaumaturge knows the manner in which true philosophy ought to be demonstrated, and wants to avoid the harm that might come to his soul through "love of honor," since the "praise" of audiences tends to slacken the moral tautness of the soul through vanity and ambition (24.11–13). Therefore he makes a display not of his learning but of silence; he demonstrates the

storehouse of his soul not with words but with deeds—through withdrawal and contemplation, and by not "meddling" with kingdoms or inquiring after positions of authority or listening to someone expound on how the commonweal ought to be administered (24.13–20). Instead he makes himself intent on how the soul ought to be "perfected" through virtue (24.20–21).

The entire episode is an adaptation, with respect to both themes and language, of a passage in book 12 of the *Laws* (949e–952d4). There the main speaker in the dialogue, the so-called Athenian Stranger, describes how the city of Magnesia (the ideal city that the Cretan Cleinias is to found and that he and his interlocutors plan throughout the dialogue) is to send out official observers or *θεωροί* on trips abroad to study other societies and their customs, before returning home to Magnesia and delivering an account of their *theoria* to the guardians of the laws. As we will see, Gregory's account follows Plato closely, sometimes incorporating the Platonic ideas and at other times subverting them in order to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian lawgiver. In what follows, we will be investigating not only clusters of words in Gregory's narrative that echo a similar cluster in the *Laws* but also single and seemingly isolated individual words. Their significance for us is enhanced by their function as lexical building blocks, directing our attention to how the entire thematic architecture of the original Platonic episode has been renovated. Gregory invokes the passage from the *Laws* in order to make clear the stakes for his own narrative: the Thaumaturge, like the interlocutors of Plato's dialogue, will be involved in nothing less than the formation of a new and idealized society. However, in having the Thaumaturge reject the real-world model of *theoria* depicted in the *Laws* and adopt instead the pose of a *theoros* engaged in the contemplation of divine truths, Gregory indicates that his ideal lawgiver will be first and foremost a Christian philosopher.

The cultural exchange pursued by the *theoroi* of Magnesia is set in relief against a more mercantile variety of exchange, as the account of the laws of *theoria* is bookended by two passages describing actual commerce. The *theoria* section begins by stating the need to discuss the laws concerning travel abroad for a city that will not otherwise be engaged in commerce (μήτ' ἐμπορεύηται, 949e4), and it ends by discussing legislation regarding travelers coming *to* the city, beginning with merchants (ἐμπορευόμενοι, 952e3). Plato's implicit

20 Van Dam, "Hagiography and History," 287, and V. Limberis, *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (Oxford, 2011), 46.

association of the theoroi with merchants, which thereby characterizes the theoroi as engaged in a sort of cultural commerce, is made explicit by Gregory, who has the Thaumaturge return from his studies abroad “laden with wealth of wisdom and knowledge, which he had acquired like a merchant (καθάπερ τις ἔμπορος, 23.22–23) in external studies having done commerce (ἐνεπορεύσατο, 23.23) through association with those of good repute” (23.20–23). The theoroi of Magnesia are to go abroad to visit different cities, both the well-governed and the poorly governed, because “divine people” (ἄνθρωποι . . . θεῖοι, 951b5) from whom they can learn are to be found no less in the one kind than the other. So Gregory travels, we might say even as a theoros, to Caesarea to study with Origen and learn “divine lessons” (τὰ θεῖα τῶν μαθημάτων, 22.15) from him. Upon returning home to Magnesia, the theoros is to report anything he has learned about the institution of laws or education or upbringing before the assembly of those who oversee the laws (περὶ θέσεως νόμων ἢ παιδείας ἢ τροφῆς . . . κοινούτω τῷ συλλόγῳ ἅπαντι, 952b7–9).²¹ The people of Neocaesarea had hoped that the Thaumaturge upon his return would become a lawgiver of life (βίου νομοθέτην, 23.30; cf. Plato’s θέσεως νόμων) and that he would display the learning he had acquired abroad to the common assemblies (δημοσιεύειν αὐτὸν ἐν κοινοῖς συλλόγοις τὴν παιδευσιν, 24.6–7).

After submitting his report, the theoros is to be commended (αἰνεῖσθω, 952c2) for his willingness to go abroad; if his travels are seen to have improved his moral quality, he is furthermore to be praised (ἐπαινεῖσθω, 952c3), and ultimately “honored with fitting honors” (τιμαῖς . . . προσηκούσαις . . . τιμάτω, 952c3–4) upon his death. If however he has been corrupted and he insists on “meddling” (πολυπραγμονῶν, 952d1–2) with education and the laws, he is to be put to death. Gregory emphasizes the differences between the Thaumaturge and the Platonic theoros by subverting this section in the *Laws*. In the Platonic model, the theoros receives honor and praise as a reward after delivering his account to the assembly—a scenario that Gregory entirely reworks. He implicitly acknowledges that this is how the narrative *should* go, for the citizens of Neocaesarea expect the Thaumaturge to demonstrate the learning

he acquired abroad: in their thinking, he would then receive good repute as the fruit of his long toils (πάντων προσδεχομένων . . . ὡς ἂν τινα καρπὸν σχοίη τῶν μακρῶν πόνων τὴν ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς εὐδοκίμησιν, 24.5–8). But the “honor” and “praise” that are the due reward of the Platonic theoros are not for the Thaumaturge, as he knows that the soul can be harmed by “love of honor” (φιλοτιμία, 24.10), and that “praise” (ἔπαινος, 24.12) can undermine moral fiber (cf. Plato’s ἐπαινεῖσθω . . . τιμαῖς . . . προσηκούσαις . . . τιμάτω, 952c3–4). Finally, the Thaumaturge does not “meddle” (πολυπραγμονῶν, 24.18; cf. Plato’s πολυπραγμονῶν, 952d1–2) with kingdoms, or make inquiries into positions of authority or listen to discussions about how best to administer public affairs; he sees instead to the perfection (τελειωθείη, 24.20–21) of the soul through virtue. It is here, with the question of what makes perfection, that we can identify the crux of Gregory’s inversion of the *Laws*, for there too the question of perfection was at stake for both individual and society (cf. τόν γε τέλεον ἄνδρα ἐσόμενον, 950c6; οὐ μένει ποτὲ τελέως πόλις, 951c4). For Magnesia, however, to strive to *seem* good is the proper vocation of those who *are* good:

διὸ καλὸν ταῖς πολλαῖς πόλεσι τὸ παρακείμενόν ἐστιν, προτιμᾶν τὴν εὐδοξίαν πρὸς τῶν πολλῶν. τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὀρθότατον καὶ μέγιστον, ὄντα ἀγαθὸν ἀληθῶς οὕτω τὸν εὐδοξον βίον θηρεύειν, χωρὶς δὲ μηδαμῶς, τόν γε τέλεον ἄνδρα ἐσόμενον, καὶ διὰ καὶ τῇ κατὰ Κρήτην οἰκισομένῃ πόλει πρέπον ἂν εἴη δόξαν πρὸς τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ὅτι καλλίστην τε καὶ ἀρίστην παρασκευάζεσθαι πρὸς ἀρετήν. (Plato, *Laws* 950c3–d1)

Therefore for many cities it is a good recommendation to hold in esteem the **good repute** of the many. For that which is greatest and most correct is that the life of **good repute** be pursued by the man who is truly good, but otherwise not at all, at least for a man who is to become perfect, and thus for the city to be founded here on Crete it would be fitting for it to acquire the best and most noble **reputation** among others for virtue.

The same moral logic that held for the community also holds for the individual: the theoroi are to be chosen from the “men of good repute” (τῶν εὐδοκίμων) in

21 For further references in this section of the *Laws* to interactions between the θεωροί and Magnesia’s σύλλογος of those who oversee the laws, see also 951d4, 952b1, and 952b5.

order to reflect better upon the city; and after successfully completing their mission, they can look forward to having their reputations enhanced through further praise and honors. The entire passage is governed by the logic of appearances, by the idea that being good will naturally lead one to strive after a good reputation. Identifying this discourse of appearance in the *Laws* passage, Gregory deconstructs it by rewriting how the Platonic model of *theoria* is supposed to end. The citizens of Neocaesarea operate in the same moral universe as those of Magnesia, and expect the Thaumaturge as *theoros* to acquire, through public displays of what he has learned abroad, a “good reputation” (εὐδοκίμησιν, 24.8) as the reward for his toils. As we saw above, the Thaumaturge declines, out of fear for the damage that “love of reputation” (φιλοδοξία, 24.12) can do to the moral fiber of the soul. Instead, the Thaumaturge withdraws in order to contemplate by himself in anchoritic retirement.

Gregory thus has the Thaumaturge invoke and then reject the narrative arc offered by the *Laws*’ depiction of *theoria*, according to which the *theoros* returns home after his exploratory trip abroad in order to share what he has learned and acquire prestige for himself. Nevertheless, the Thaumaturge will in fact turn out to become a lawgiver in his own right, as he ultimately fulfills the citizens’ desire for a “chartering founder of virtue and a lawgiver of life” (οἰκιστὴν ἀρετῆς καὶ βίου νομοθέτην, 23.30). In his anchoritic retirement the Thaumaturge is compared to Moses, the exemplum par excellence of the lawgiver in Christian exegesis.²² In this tradition, Moses also serves as the paradigmatic *theoros*, but of a kind different from that described in the *Laws*. The passages in both the *Laws* and the *Life* describe a process of *theoria* in pursuit of perfection, but the *Life* invokes the theoric model of the *Laws* only to pivot to Moses and a different kind of *theoria*.

In order to characterize the Thaumaturge’s pursuit of a different sort of perfection, Gregory moves to an abstract, metaphorical model: that of the contemplative *theoros* who withdraws from the world in order to engage in *theoria* or contemplation of the

divine.²³ This is an understanding of *theoria* that plays a prominent role in other Platonic dialogues and enjoys an exceptionally long afterlife, but does not feature in the *Laws*.²⁴ For Gregory, as for his fellow Cappadocian Gregory of Nazianzus and for Philo before them, Moses served as the exemplary contemplative *theoros* of the divine mysteries.²⁵ Accordingly Gregory has the Thaumaturge take up the anchoritic life immediately after declining the theoric model offered in the *Laws*. At this point Gregory begins an extended *synkrisis* comparing the Thaumaturge to Moses, and his treatment of the Thaumaturge’s *anachoresis* largely agrees

23 For an overview of contemplative *theoria* in the Platonic and patristic traditions, see A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2007).

24 For the development of the metaphor of contemplative *theoria*, see A. W. Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: “Theoria” in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge, 2004), as well as idem, “The Philosopher at the Festival: Plato’s Transformation of Traditional *Theoria*,” in *Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, ed. J. Elsner (Oxford, 2007), 151–80. See also Rutherford, *State Pilgrims and Sacred Observers*, 324–38, and idem, “*Theoria* and Darśan: Pilgrimage and Vision in Greece and India,” *CQ* 50 (2000): 133–46.

25 For Philo’s Platonic exegesis of Moses, see D. Runia, “Platonism, Philonism, and the Beginnings of Christian Thought,” in idem, *Philo and the Church Fathers: A Collection of Papers* (Leiden, 1995), 1–24; he singles out three passages from the books of Moses as the decisive texts in Philo’s selection of the “Platonist paradigm” to show how “insights from the Greek philosophical tradition could be localized in the authoritative words of scripture” (15). For the role of Moses in Gregory of Nazianzus’s construction of contemplative *theoria*, see C. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford, 2008), 65 n. 6: “Gregory [of Nazianzus] is largely responsible for creating the image of Moses as a primary model of Christian growth and the vision of God. There are brief statements in Origen that hint at such a use of Moses. In *Comm. Jn.* 32.338–343 Origen refers to the glory that shone in Moses’ face ‘when he was conversing with the divine nature’ on Mount Sinai, to which he adds a summary comment on purification and contemplation. . . . Gregory, however, makes Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai paradigmatic for Christians. Through Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Moses* and the Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* as well—both of which follow Gregory Nazianzen’s work—the motif becomes standard in Eastern and Western spirituality.” For Gregory of Nyssa’s treatment of *theoria*, see especially J. Daniélou’s classic *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1944), specifically pp. 145–51 in the chapter “La nuée ou De la Contemplation” (119–72), which refers frequently to Moses’ *theoria* in Gregory’s *Life of Moses*.

22 For the figure of Moses in the patristic tradition in general, see C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2005), 125–36, on how Moses was constructed as the ideal episcopal exemplar of spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic authority.

with his description of the anachoresis of Moses in his own *Life of Moses*.²⁶

The Thaumaturge, like Moses, withdraws from the world in order “to comprehend divine mysteries through the pure eye of the soul” (πέρας γὰρ τῶν ἀμφοτέρων τῆς τῶν πολλῶν ἀναχωρήσεως ἦν τὸ καθαρῶ τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ὀφθαλμῷ κατανοῆσαι, 25.8–10). Both the Thaumaturge and Moses then contemplate visions, which they in turn pass on to their respective peoples in their guise as lawgivers. The Thaumaturge’s contemplative retreat results in his first major achievement as a lawgiver: a creed for Neocaesarea in which the congregation will continue to be initiated up until Gregory’s day, as Gregory tells us.²⁷ The creed comes to the Thaumaturge during his period of anchoritic contemplation in a divine revelation: he has a vision of John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary (29–31), and Mary instructs John to dictate to the Thaumaturge the creed, which the latter writes down as soon as he wakes up (32). He then initiates the people in accordance with the text of the divinely revealed creed. Gregory directly compares the Thaumaturge in this respect to Moses, who was granted a vision of God on Sinai and brought back to his people the tablets of the law (33.7–18). In his *Life of Moses* Gregory similarly treated Moses the lawgiver as a Platonic sage engaged in contemplative theoria. Behind the *Life of Moses*, and behind the other Cappadocians’ frequent use of Moses as an exemplum of the Platonic theoros, ultimately stands Philo’s handling of the same material from Exodus. All these figures view the Moses story (the “literal” meaning of the text) as a Platonic parable for the soul’s withdrawal from the world and its ascent through the use of symbols to the contemplation of the divine (the “spiritual” meaning behind the text).²⁸ Gregory casts the Thaumaturge in the role of this Platonic Moses who contemplates a vision of the divine and then establishes a religious code for his people. Gregory has his hero reject the real-world model of theoria depicted in

the *Laws*: the Thaumaturge refuses to make a display of the worldly learning he had acquired in his travels abroad. Instead, he journeys introspectively on an anchoritic retreat, embracing the contemplative model of philosophical theoria that Christian exegetes had grafted onto the Moses narrative. In constructing the Thaumaturge’s travels, homecoming, and contemplative retreat, Gregory demonstrates how the figure of the Christian lawgiver transcends his counterpart in Plato’s *Laws*.

As is so often true of the *Life*, Gregory’s treatment of the Thaumaturge’s theoria has more to say about fourth-century Cappadocian ideology than about the Thaumaturge’s third-century context. We can interpret this story arc—a return from study abroad, a refusal to make a display of his learning, and an anchoritic retreat that prepares him for the episcopacy—as a cipher for the self-presentation of late antique Christian leaders with extensive rhetorical training. Many, including both Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, had studied in the great educational centers abroad, and upon returning home were expected to make a “display” of the learning they had acquired. Some, including Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, seem to have gone so far as to become professionally active rhetoricians before eventually engaging in self-conscious performances of philosophical anachoresis and theoria,²⁹ which they present as the most important criteria for spiritual authority.³⁰ On the need for the would-be Christian leader, upon returning home after concluding rhetorical studies abroad, to resist the societal

26 For the similar depiction of ἀναχώρησις in the *Lives* of both the Thaumaturge and Moses, see Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 36–37.

27 For a summary of scholarship on the text of the creed, see Maraval, 18–23 (n. 1 above). For a much-cited study arguing against the authenticity of the creed, see L. Abramowski, “Das Bekenntnis des Gregor Thaumaturgus bei Gregor von Nyssa und das Problem seiner Echtheit,” *ZKirkheng* 87 (1976): 145–66.

28 See n. 25 above.

29 For Gregory of Nazianzus’s rhetorical performances and teaching after returning home from Athens, see S. Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley, 2012), 150–51. For Gregory of Nyssa’s stint as professional rhetor, see for example Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 115–16.

30 See Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, 153–63, on Gregory of Nazianzus’s depiction in his second oration of his retreat to Pontus, after his “forced” ordination at the hands of his father, as the anachoresis that afforded him the opportunity to engage in contemplative theoria. One could also point to Basil’s period of contemplative retreat in Pontus in the period leading up to his election to the episcopacy; see in particular Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Funeral Oration* for Basil and his depiction of the latter’s anachoresis (*Or.* 43.29). My warm thanks go to Joel Kalvesmaki for suggesting this apt parallel. For further instances of this carefully choreographed self-presentation, see R. Lizza Testa, *Il potere episcopale nell’Oriente romano: Rappresentazione ideologica e realtà politica (IV–V sec. d.C.)* (Rome, 1987).

expectation to acquire reputation through rhetorical displays of his newly acquired learning, and instead devote himself to Christian philosophy as the critical prerequisite for a career in the church, we can turn to a letter of Gregory of Nazianzus addressed to none other than Gregory of Nyssa himself:

Οὐκ ἐπαινοῦσί σου τὴν ἄδοξον εὐδοξίαν ἵν' εἴπω
τι καὶ γὰρ καθ' ὑμᾶς, καὶ τὴν κατὰ μικρὸν ἐπὶ τὰ
χείρω ῥοπήν, καὶ τὴν κακίστην δαιμονίων, ἣ
φησιν Εὐριπίδης, φιλοτιμίαν.³¹

They don't praise your disreputable good repute,
so that I too may say something in your style,
nor your gradual decline to baser things, nor
"that worst of divine powers," as Euripides says,
"the love of honor."

Gregory of Nyssa had been attracting attention as a learned rhetor, but Gregory of Nazianzus warns him that his "good repute" and "love of honor" are not winning him any friends within the Christian community, who deny him the "praise" that these attributes might garner from worldly society. It is a similar set—praise (ἐπαινος, 24.12), love of honor (φιλοτιμία, 24.10), and the love of reputation (φιλοδοξία, 24.12)—that the Thaumaturge rejects when he disappoints Neocaesarean society in its expectation that he will win good repute through a rhetorical display of learning after returning home from his studies. For Gregory's fourth-century audience, that expectation would recall contemporary scenarios, in which members of the elite returning from studies abroad would be expected to display their learning before the local community.³² Similarly charged with fourth-century resonance is the Thaumaturge's anchoretic withdrawal, which served

as a prelude to his elevation to the episcopacy.³³ The Thaumaturge's trajectory is made to anticipate the careers of the Cappadocians, who present their own periods of contemplative asceticism as the ideal prerequisite for a leadership role in the church. The construction of the Thaumaturge as a Platonic lawgiver, who invokes the narrative from the *Laws* before inverting it, and who is then assimilated to the figure of Moses, thus conforms to and enhances the self-presentation of Gregory of Nyssa and his peers as well.

2. The Legislation of Festivals

One of the Thaumaturge's great legacies as presented in the *Life* is his institution of martyr cult after an imperial persecution of Christians. As before when he was ordained bishop after returning from his travels abroad, in this case too his actions evoke the figure of the Platonic lawgiver, for once again Gregory draws on the *Laws*. Above we saw how Gregory complicates Plato's portrait of the travels of the lawgiver, and pivots to a different Platonic model for the activity of the theoros. Here, however, the Thaumaturge's institution of martyr cult is largely in sync with its Platonic model. In this passage, we will see how a fourth-century philosopher-rhetor such as Gregory can use Plato to articulate the ideal function of martyr cult in a Christian society:

Τῆς δὲ τυραννίδος ἐκείνης ἤδη κατὰ θείαν
συμμαχίαν διαλυθείσης, καὶ πάλιν εἰρήνης
τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ζωὴν διαδεξαμένης, καθ' ἣν
ἄνετος ἦν κατ' ἐξουσίαν προκειμένη πᾶσιν ἡ
περὶ τὸ Θεῖον σπουδὴ, καταβάς πάλιν ἐπὶ τὴν
πόλιν, καὶ πᾶσαν περινοστήσας ἐν κύκλῳ τὴν
χώραν, προσθήκην ἐποιεῖτο τοῖς ἀπανταχοῦ
λαοῖς τῆς περὶ τὸ Θεῖον σπουδῆς, τὰς ὑπὲρ τῶν
ἐνηθληκότων τῇ πίστει πανηγύρεις νομοθετήσας.
Καὶ διαλαβόντες ἄλλος ἄλλαχῇ τῶν μαρτύρων
τὰ σώματα, κατὰ τὴν ἐτήσιον τοῦ ἐνιαυσιαίου
κύκλου περίοδον συνιόντες, ἡγάλλοντο τῇ τιμῇ
τῶν μαρτύρων πανηγυρίζοντες. Καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ
τοῦτο τῆς μεγάλης αὐτοῦ σοφίας ἀπόδειξις ἦν, ὅτι
πρὸς καινὸν βίον μεταρρυθμίζων πᾶσαν ἀθρόως
τὴν κατ' αὐτὸν γενεάν, οἶόν τις ἡνίοχος ἐπιστάς

31 *Ep.* 11.3; P. Gallay, ed. and trans., *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Lettres*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1964), 16–18.

32 We might again turn to Gregory of Nazianzus (*De vita sua*, 265–66), this time on his own return home from his studies in Athens, for how he was expected to make a "display" of his learning for society's sake: "I came, I gave a display of rhetoric, I satisfied the sickness of some who demanded this of me as if it were some kind of obligation I owed" (ἦλθον, λόγους ἔδειξα, τὴν τινῶν νόσον / ἐπλησ' ἀπαιτούντων με τοῦθ' ὥς τι χρέος); *Gregor von Nazianz: De Vita Sua*, ed. C. Jungck (Heidelberg, 1974). Gregory of Nazianzus describes this activity as just a prelude to "greater mysteries" (276), and goes on to describe the "middle path" that he navigates for himself between coenobitic and eremitic asceticism (310).

33 Maraval, 126 n. 2, notes that the Thaumaturge is presented in such a way as to serve as a forerunner to contemporary monastic communities, such as those founded by Gregory's brother Basil.

τῇ φύσει, καὶ τοῖς τῆς πίστεως καὶ θεογνωσίας χαλινοῖς ἀσφαλῶς αὐτοὺς ὑποζεύξας, ἐνεδίδου τι μικρὸν τῷ ζυγῷ τῆς πίστεως δι' εὐφροσύνης ὑποσκιρτᾶν τὸ ὑπήκοον. Συνιδὼν γὰρ ὅτι ταῖς σωματικαῖς θυμηδίαις τῇ περὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα πλάνη παραμένει τὸ νηπιῶδες τῶν πολλῶν καὶ ἀπαίδευτον· ὡς ἂν τὸ προηγούμενον τέως ἐν αὐτοῖς μάλιστα κατορθωθείη, τὸ πρὸς Θεὸν ἀντὶ τῶν ματαίων σεβασμάτων βλέπειν, ἐπαφῆκεν αὐτοῖς ταῖς τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων ἐμφαιδρύνεσθαι μνήμαις, καὶ εὐπαθεῖν, καὶ ἀγάλλεσθαι, ὡς χρόνῳ ποτὲ κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον πρὸς σεμνότερόν τε καὶ ἀκριβέστερον μετατετησομένου τοῦ βίου, καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖνο καθηγουμένης τῆς πίστεως, ὅπερ δὴ καὶ ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς ἤδη κατωρθώθη, πάσης θυμηδίας ἀπὸ τῶν τοῦ σώματος ἡδέων πρὸς τὸ πνευματικὸν τῆς εὐφροσύνης εἶδος μετατεθείσης. (94)

When by divine aid that tyranny had already been ended, and peace had again taken its place in human life, in which zeal for the divine lay by license within free grasp of all, he came back down to the city, and he went round the whole country in a circle, and everywhere he contributed to an increase in the populace's devotion to the divine by instituting festivals in honor of those who bore up bravely in the struggle for the faith. And they took up the bodies of the martyrs, some here and some there, and gathering together annually on the anniversary, they began to celebrate festivals by rejoicing in the honor done to the martyrs. And indeed this too was a demonstration of his great wisdom: in adapting the rhythm of the entire generation of that time to a new life, like a charioteer presiding over nature, and having securely yoked them to the bit and bridle of faith and knowledge of God, he gave some slack to the obedient that they might frolic a little in joyousness under the yoke of faith. For he knew that it is through the bodily pleasures that the infantile and uneducated among the many cleave to the errors of idolatry. So that to begin with at least the principal thing might be successfully accomplished among them—namely that they look to God instead of vain objects of worship—he allowed them to enjoy themselves in the memorials for the martyrs, and to make

merry, and rejoice, with the expectation that in time their lives would turn of their own accord to a more devout and strict direction, and that their faith would lead to that which has by now been accomplished even among the populace, as all their delight in body pleasures has now transferred to the spiritual form of joy.

Once again, Gregory's model is a passage in the *Laws*—in this case, one describing the institution of festivals and their divinely ordained purpose:

τούτων γὰρ δὴ τῶν ὀρθῶς τετραμμένων ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν παιδείων οὐσῶν χαλᾶται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ διαφθείρεται κατὰ πολλὰ ἐν τῷ βίῳ, θεοὶ δὲ οἰκτίραντες τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπίπονον πεφυκὸς γένος, ἀναπαύλας τε αὐτοῖς τῶν πόνων ἐτάξαντο τὰς τῶν ἐορτῶν ἀμοιβὰς τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ Μούσας Ἀπόλλωνά τε μουσηγέτην καὶ Διόνυσον συνεορταστὰς ἔδοσαν, ἵν' ἐπανορθῶνται, τὰς τε τροφὰς γενομένας ἐν ταῖς ἐορταῖς μετὰ θεῶν. (653c7–d5)

For since the instruction of children consists in pleasures and pains being correctly cultivated, and among humankind [this instruction] grows slack and deteriorates in many respects over a lifetime, the gods took pity on the human race, born as it was to toil, and arranged as periods of rest from their labors the alternation of festivals for the gods, and gave them the Muses and Apollo the leader of the Muses and Dionysus to be their fellow celebrants at these festivals, so that they might be corrected in their upbringing and culture, since this would now take place at festivals with the gods.

Both passages are structured around the theme of the education of a childlike or uncultured people. In Plato, this is part of a larger section on correct education (τὴν ὀρθὴν παιδείαν, 653a1), which begins with children and takes the form of the inculcation of virtue (παιδείαν δὴ λέγω τὴν παραγιγνομένην πρῶτον παισὶν ἀρετήν, 653b1–2). Festivals are instituted, as Plato says, in order to function as a sort of continuing education to reinforce the lessons of childhood when they grow slack. Similarly, Gregory's festival program is directed at reforming those in the population who

are “infantile and uneducated” (τὸ νηπιῶδες τῶν πολλῶν καὶ ἀπαιδευτον). In both Plato and Gregory, festivals are conceived of as preventing a complete relapse into earlier habits. Through Plato’s festivals people are “corrected” (ἐπανορθῶνται), and in Gregory it is through festivals that the proper manner of life is “established” (κατορθωθείη, 94.19; κατῶρθωται, 94.25). In both cases this instruction is made easier thanks to an understanding of and allowance for human nature: festivals are the spoonful of sugar that makes the medicine of instruction go down. They combine relaxation and entertainment with education. As we discover further on in Plato, festivals are not simply “periods of rest from labor” instituted by the gods in pity for humankind; on the contrary, the dance and music performed at festivals represent the primary part of the soul’s education, which comes from Apollo and the Muses (θῶμεν παιδείαν εἶναι πρώτην διὰ Μουσῶν τε καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος, 654a6–7). The case is the same in Gregory’s narrative, which depicts festival celebration as the proverbial honey on the cup that exploits people’s natural proclivity to physical pleasures in order to gradually win them over to a more pious life. As Plato’s gods pitied humans and gave them festivals for rest, so the Thaumaturge in his wisdom, after first securing his flock to the bit and bridle of faith, then “allowed them to frolic a little in joyousness (δι’ εὐφροσύνης ὑποσκιρτᾶν) under the yoke of faith.” Gregory seems to owe his expression here to Plato’s description of how festival dances are an instructional accommodation to the young, who are always “leaping about and frolicking” (τὰ μὲν ἀλλόμενα καὶ σκιρτῶντα, 653e1–2). The importance of joy at the festival is of course a prominent motif both in Plato (χαρὰς, which is in fact here etymologized from χορούς, 654a5) and in Gregory (εὐφροσύνης, 94.16; ἐμφαιδρύνεσθαι μνήμας, καὶ εὐπαθεῖν, καὶ ἀγάλλεσθαι, 94.21–22). Finally, in establishing festivals the Thaumaturge hopes to “adapt the rhythm” of society to a new life: πρὸς καινὸν βίον μεταρρυθμίζων (94.12). It is precisely this “rhythm” that, according to Plato, is the major contribution of festivals to education. The orderliness of movement, which is called “rhythm and harmony” (οἷς δὴ ρυθμὸς ὄνομα καὶ ἁρμονία, 653e5), is inculcated by the gods, who have been given to us as our fellow dancers and who have taught us “a feel for rhythm and harmony with pleasure”: εἵπομεν τοὺς θεοὺς συγχορευτὰς δεδόσθαι, τούτους εἶναι καὶ τοὺς δεδωκότας τὴν ἑνρυθμόν τε καὶ ἐναρμόνιον αἰσθησιν μεθ’ ἡδονῆς (654a1).

The Thaumaturge’s concession to the physical pleasure offered by festival celebration is meant to be the first step in the inculcation of morality. Festival celebration first secures the populace in the worship of the true God, and then leads naturally (or “of its own accord”) to a more pious and spiritual manner of life (ὡς χρόνῳ ποτὲ κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον πρὸς σεμνότερόν τε καὶ ἀκριβέστερον μετατετησομένου τοῦ βίου, 94.22–24). This description corresponds to the passage in the *Laws* immediately preceding the account of the institution of festivals, where Plato explains how virtue is first developed by properly cultivating “pleasure, friendship, pain, and hatred” in the soul in such a way that children learn to hate what they ought to hate and love what they ought to love (653b2–c2). This happens at a stage when they cannot yet comprehend what is happening by reason (μήπω δυναμένων λόγῳ λαμβάνειν, 653b3–4); but later, when they are able to comprehend the explanation, they agree with its claim that they have been educated correctly by the appropriate customs (συμφωνήσωσι τῷ λόγῳ ὁρθῶς εἰθίσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν προσηκόντων ἐθῶν, 653b4–6). In each passage we have a twofold progression in moral education: as in Plato, members of the Thaumaturge’s community first learn to associate good things (in his case, worship of God) with pleasure (the pleasure of festival celebration). Then they advance to a more elevated understanding of morality: in Plato the students come to understand and agree with the principles underlying their moral instruction, while the Thaumaturge’s populace progresses from a stage based on physical enjoyment of the festivals to “a more devout and strict life” (πρὸς τὸ σεμνότερόν τε καὶ ἀκριβέστερον μετατετησομένου) and “a more spiritual form of joy” (πρὸς τὸ πνευματικὸν τῆς εὐφροσύνης εἶδος).

Gregory has taken Plato’s account of the dynamics of an idealized education in Magnesia and applied it to the Thaumaturge’s Christianization of the Pontic countryside. In the passage describing the Thaumaturge’s return home from his trip abroad, Gregory drew on the language of the *Laws* to cast his subject in the role of the Platonic lawgiver, and indeed he has the populace of Neocaesarea expect the Thaumaturge to “become a lawgiver” (βίου νομοθέτην ἐσόμενον, 23.30). In his description of the Thaumaturge’s institution of martyr cults, Gregory adapts the language of the *Laws* as, once again, he depicts his subject as the “lawgiver” who literally “legislates” festivals (πανηγύρεις νομοθετήσας, 94.7–8).

We should note as well the change that has taken place with respect to the entities that join together with the locals in celebration of the festival. In Plato it is clear that the presence of the gods themselves is a major feature of the festival: Apollo, the Muses, and Dionysus are named as “co-celebrants” (συνεορταστές, 654a1), and the people are said to celebrate the festival “together with the gods” (ἐν ταῖς ἐορταῖς μετὰ θεῶν, 653d5). These gods are “our fellow dancers” (συγχορευτές, 654a1; see also 665a3–6), and they teach us to sing and dance with one another (κινεῖν τε ἡμᾶς καὶ χορηγεῖν ἡμῶν τούτους, ὥδαῖς τε καὶ ὀρχήσεσιν ἀλλήλοις συνείροντας, 654a3–4). The festivals in Gregory’s narrative are also marked by the presence of holy beings, but in his case the holy beings are the martyrs themselves. Their physical remains are at the center of festival celebration, and the people rejoice at their memorials: ταῖς τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων ἐμφαιδρύνεσθαι μνήμαις, καὶ εὐπαθεῖν, καὶ ἀγάλλεσθαι (94.21–22). The martyrs are no longer leaders of the chorus, but it is their presence, like that of Apollo and the Muses in the *Laws*, that provides the festival with its most characteristic feature: festal celebration in proximity to the divine. The saints and their festivals take the place of Apollo and Dionysus in teaching the villagers how to live a life in harmony with the divine.

This passage of the *Laws* treating the establishment of festivals proved popular in the tradition of festival epideictic rhetoric. However, festival orations in this tradition allude only to Plato’s description of how the gods established festivals after taking pity on humankind as a rest from their toils, without engaging with any of the other material from the passage. As a representative example we can turn to the rhetorical handbook falsely attributed in the manuscript tradition to Dionysius of Halicarnassus: in reality it is a composite collection, and our festival section is datable anywhere from the third to fifth centuries.³⁴ The section on festival speeches (literally a “*technē* concerning festival speeches,” τέχνη περὶ τῶν πανηγυρικῶν) begins with an explicit reference to the *Laws* passage:

34 For this text see Russell and Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (n. 12 above), who offer an appendix with an introduction to and translation of the section of the handbook devoted to festival speeches at 362–81. For the edition of the text, see *Dionysii Halicarnasei quae exstant*, ed. L. Radermacher and H. Usener, vol. 6 (Leipzig, 1905), 255–60. For the dating of the section on festival speeches, see Russell and Wilson, *Menander Rhetor*, 362.

Πανηγύρεις εὕρημα μὲν καὶ δῶρον θεῶν εἰς ἀνάπαυσιν τῶν περὶ τὸν βίον αἰεὶ πόνων παραδιδόμεναι, ὥς που ὁ Πλάτων φησὶν, οἰκτειράντων τῶν θεῶν τὸ ἀνθρώπειον ἐπίπονον γένος· συνήχθησαν δὲ ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων σοφῶν, κατεστάθησαν δὲ ὑπὸ πόλεων κοινῇ κοινῶ δόγματι εἰς τέρψιν καὶ ψυχαγωγίαν τῶν παρόντων. συντέλεια δὲ ἡ εἰς τὰς πανηγύρεις ἄλλη ἄλλων[.] (255)

Festivals are a discovery and a gift of the gods that are passed on as a relief from the never-ending toils of life, as Plato says somewhere, when the gods took pity on the long-suffering human race: festivals were arranged by wise men and established by cities in common with common teaching for the delight and amusement of those in attendance. And different people make different contributions to festivals[.]

Libanius opens his *ekphrasis* on the *Kalends* with a similar sentiment:

Τὰς ἐορτὰς οἱ ἄνθρωποι φιλοῦσιν, ὅτι αὐτοὺς ἀπαλλάττουσι μὲν πόνων τε καὶ ἰδρώτων, παρέχουσι δὲ παίζειν καὶ εὐωχεῖσθαι καὶ ὥς ἥδιστα διάγειν.³⁵

People love festivals because they relieve them from labors and toil [cf. Plato’s ἀναπαύλας τε αὐτοῖς τῶν πόνων], and offer them the chance to play and feast and pass the time as sweetly as possible.

In both Libanius and the handbook attributed to Dionysius, however, the echo of the *Laws* is limited to a topos consisting of only a few words. Gregory’s episode-length engagement with the *Laws’* description of the institution and purpose of festivals is on a different scale. His reworking of point after point from Plato’s original could have been appreciated only by an audience with adequate knowledge of the entire passage in question, not limited simply to the topos employed in the specimens of festival rhetoric cited above.

As noted above, Raymond Van Dam and other commentators have observed that the *Life* tells us less

35 Libanius, *Libanii Opera*, ed. R. Foerster, vol. 8, *Progymnasmata, Argumenta Orationum Demosthenicarum* (Leipzig, 1915 [repr. Hildesheim, 1963]), 472–77 (= *Progymnasmata* 12.5) at 472 (12.5.1).

about third-century Pontus than about the author's fourth-century circumstances: "Hence the portrait of Gregory Thaumaturgus offered in this *Vita* seems to function better as justification or explanation for fourth-century theology or for fourth-century ecclesiastical administration and, especially, the role of the bishop than as an historical account of Gregory's career as a bishop in Pontus."³⁶ This insight is useful for interpreting Gregory's development of material from Plato's *Laws* regarding festivals, theoria, and the figure of the lawgiver. The Thaumaturge offers Gregory a subject upon which to project his ideas about the roles he himself plays as a bishop, theologian, and promoter of martyr cult. It is Gregory of Nyssa himself who institutes festivals like those of the *Laws* that offer both enjoyment and instruction. It is Gregory himself who, in works such as his *Life of Moses*, demonstrates how the Christian spiritual leader should emulate the Platonic Moses, the theoros of Sinai.

Vasiliki Limberis has noted that with the Cappadocians "for the first time in Christian history the bishops could shape the cult of the martyrs with more direct and profound results."³⁷ We should remember the rhetorical training that went into the making of these Cappadocian bishops. Following Limberis, we can say that in the case of the Cappadocians, for the first time in Christian history, philosopher-rhetors "could shape the cult of martyrs with more direct and profound results."

Moreover, Julian's legislation of 362 that prohibited Christians from teaching the classics changed these Christian philosopher-rhetors forever, as each carried a chip on his shoulder regarding the legitimacy of his claim to classical literature.³⁸ Susanna Elm has

shown that much of the literary activity of Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, needs to be read as an ongoing response to this act of Julian's:

When Julian and Gregory [of Nazianzus] are read together, the extent to which Gregory laid the foundations of his intellectual oeuvre in direct counterpoint to Julian's writings and actions becomes apparent. . . . Arguments over who truly owned *logoi*, the heritage of Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, and so on (that is, Hellenism), were central for Julian and Gregory as well as for all the others fighting over that vision as the paramount source of ascetic and spiritual authority, the primary font of the true philosophical life.³⁹

Who owned the *logoi* of Plato's *Laws*? This question may have been on Gregory of Nyssa's mind. His authorial moves to claim texts such as the *Phaedo* are well known, and in fact Ellen Muehlberger has interpreted Gregory's Socratic portrait of his sister Macrina in his *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* as part of a larger response to Julian.⁴⁰ It may have been the case that the *Laws* represented another piece of contested territory. Dominic O'Meara has suggested that "Julian's conception of the political importance of religion corresponds to what can be found in Plato's *Laws*."⁴¹ Other scholars have emphasized the role of the *Laws* in Julian's *Letter to Themistius*, and Michael Schramm echoes O'Meara in describing how "not only the constitutional framework of Julian's kingship, but also laws he enacted are based on the *Laws*."⁴² Did

36 Van Dam, "Hagiography and History" (n. 2 above), 287. See also Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 46: "Of equal importance, both used the Thaumaturgus to give ecclesiastical authority to the cult of the martyrs and saints. They argue that the Wonderworker essentially instituted the cult, making him look suspiciously like one of their fourth-century peers. Gregory of Nyssa gives the clear impression that the Thaumaturgus is a great bishop, in the style of his fourth-century contemporaries."

37 Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 11.

38 For Julian's edict against teaching, see Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, 139–43, and T. Banchich, "Julian's School Laws: *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.5 and *Ep.* 42," *Ancient World* 24 (1993): 5–14. Elm has shown how much of the literary activity of Gregory of Nazianzus needs to be read as an ongoing response to this act of Julian's: "Julian in both orations [*Ors.* 4 and 5] serves as God's and Gregory's teaching tool

to demonstrate for all what actions, thoughts, and behavior, public and private, had to be abandoned as Hellenic, a characteristic Julian now epitomizes, so that all else, all *logoi*, now characterized as *orthoi*—right thoughts, actions, and behavior—are properly 'ours,' Christian" (477).

39 Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, 10–11.

40 See Muehlberger, "Salvage" (n. 15 above).

41 D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2003), 123.

42 M. Schramm, "Platonic Ethics and Politics in Themistius and Julian," in Fowler, *Plato in the Third Sophistic* (n. 13 above), 139. For Julian and the *Laws*, see also S. Swain, *Themistius, Julian, and Greek Political Theory under Rome: Texts, Translations and Studies of Four Key Works* (Cambridge, 2013), 37, 59–60. For the *Laws* in general in late antiquity, see O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, especially chap. 10, "The Political Function of Religion," 116–31, 134–36 (Proclus on *Laws*

Christian philosopher-rhetors feel the need to rehabilitate the *Laws* after what was perceived as the dialogue's misuse at the hands of Julian, as well as to demonstrate a Christian claim to the text? It is difficult to be sure whether Gregory's use of the *Laws* in sketching out the role of the Christian νομοθέτης specifically represents a response to Julian. However, it is certainly a demonstration of Gregory's claim over the *Laws* and the tradition it represents as the patrimony of the Christian leadership class. Gregory and his peers are the true inheritors of texts like the *Laws*, and it is they who are to serve as lawgivers in developing the social and religious institutions of a new society.

In Gregory's adaptation of the *Laws*, we have a glimpse of how a fourth-century philosopher-rhetor could conceptualize his own role as a leader in the Christian community—especially in promoting the cult of saints, an endeavor in which Gregory was particularly active.⁴³ Gregory had attained the heights of “external” wisdom, and was in a position to leave a deep imprint on what, in its public form, was still a young religion. The *Life* suggests that he and his peers could be presented as lawgivers—Platonic sages in communion with the divine, who institute new religious customs in order to mold their communities into shape.

3. Walls, Virtue, and Nature: The *Laws* and the Ordering of a Christian Worldview

We have seen the ways in which Gregory's characterization of the Thaumaturge as a θεωρός and νομοθέτης

709b5–c1). For another major late antique reading of the *Laws*, that of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, see also Y. Papadogiannakis, *Christianity and Hellenism in the Fifth-Century Greek East: Theodoret's Apologetics against the Greeks in Context* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 105–19, with bibliography on citations from the *Laws* among the church fathers.

43 Gregory's encomium for Basil suggests that he even presided over his brother's “canonization,” as noted by Maraval in his translation of Gregory's oration for Basil: *Grégoire de Nysse: Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge, Éloge de Basile* (see n. 1), 51. For Gregory's role in promoting the cult of Basil as well as that of his sister Macrina, see Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 148–55. Even in cases when the saint's cult seems already to have been established, Gregory was often instrumental in its popularization: his oration for the festival of St. Theodore “the Recruit” represents the oldest surviving evidence for the saint's cult (see Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 55–62). For background and translation, see J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, and B. Dehandschutter, *Let Us Die That We May Live: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350–AD 450)* (London, 2003), 82–91.

responds to Plato's *Laws* and its description of how these two roles are to function. The two passages in the *Life* discussed above should lead us to pay closer attention to other moments when the influence of the *Laws* may be felt. In what follows I consider two further pairs of passages that deserve our attention as we examine Gregory's use of the *Laws*. In each instance, Gregory has the Thaumaturge himself deliver an oration in which he corrects the logic of the *Laws* so as to emphasize the new hierarchies of the Christian worldview.

The first pair of passages (*Life* 44 and *Laws* 778–79) share the same thematic structure: a contrast between private buildings on the one hand and private and public virtue on the other. We will see that not only do both passages make this thematic juxtaposition, but Gregory's language seems once again modeled on that of Plato. Before comparing in detail the language of each passage, we should examine them in their own contexts.

The Thaumaturge is said to take no home for himself; rather, his “virtue and faith are for him his homeland and hearth and wealth.” To those who express concern over where he is to lodge and find shelter, he answers:

Μικρὸς ὑμῖν οἶκος ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δοκεῖ, εἴπερ ἐν αὐτῷ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν; ἢ στενοχωρεῖσθε τῇ οὐρανίῳ σκέπῃ καὶ ζητεῖτε παρὰ τοῦτο καταγώγιον ἄλλο; εἰς οἶκος ὑμῖν ἔστω διὰ σπουδῆς ὁ ἐκάστου ἴδιος, ὁ διὰ τῶν ἀρετῶν οἰκοδομούμενος καὶ εἰς ὕψος ἀνατεινόμενος. Τοῦτο λυπεῖτω μόνον, μὴ τὸ τοιοῦτον ὑμῖν οἰκητήριον ἀπαράσκειν ἢ. Αἱ γὰρ τῶν γῆινων τοίχων περιβολαὶ τοῖς ἐν ἀρετῇ ζῶσι κέρδος οὐ φέρουσι, μᾶλλον δ' ἂν εἰκότως ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν κακίᾳ μολυνομένων ἢ τῶν τοίχων χρεῖα σπουδάζοιτο διότι προκάλυμμα πολλᾶκις τῶν κρυπτῶν τῆς αἰσχύνῃς ὁ οἶκος γίνεται. Οἷς δὲ δι' ἀρετῆς ἡ ζωὴ κατορθοῦται, οὐκ ἔχουσιν οἱ τοῖχοι ὅ τι περικαλύψουσιν. (*Life* 44.11–24)

Does God seem a small house to you, God *in whom we live and move and have our being* [Acts 17:28]? Or do you feel constrained under the roof of heaven and seek some other lodging besides this? Let it be a concern to you that you have one house, namely that which each builds and raises up on high through his virtues. Let

this only be a cause of grief to you: if such a dwelling place should prove not pleasing to you. For the enclosures of earthen walls bring no profit to those who live in virtue, but the need for walls would rather be sought after by those who are stained by wickedness, because a house often becomes a cover for hidden deeds of shame. But those whose life is achieved with virtue do not have anything that walls will hide.

For the Thaumaturge, private homes are less important than the homes we build “through virtue,” and private walls in fact have a negative influence on morality. Compare the Athenian Stranger’s arguments against the use of city walls:

περὶ δὲ τειχῶν, ὦ Μέγилλε, ἔγωγ’ ἂν τῇ Σπάρτῃ συμφερούμεν τὸ καθεύδειν ἅν ἐν τῇ γῇ κατακείμενα τὰ τεῖχη καὶ μὴ ἐπανιστάναι, τῶνδε εἶνεκα. καλῶς μὲν καὶ ὁ ποιητικὸς ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν λόγος ὑμνεῖται, τὸ χαλκᾶ καὶ σιδηρᾶ δεῖν εἶναι τὰ τεῖχη μάλλον ἢ γῆναι· τὸ δ’ ἡμέτερον ἔτι πρὸς τούτοις γέλωτ’ ἂν δικαίως πάμπολυν ὄφλοι, τὸ κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν μὲν ἐκπέμπειν εἰς τὴν χώραν τοὺς νέους, τὰ μὲν σκάψοντας, τὰ δὲ ταφρεύοντας, τὰ δὲ καὶ διὰ τινων οἰκοδομήσεων εἰρξοντας τοὺς πολεμίους, ὡς δὴ τῶν ὄρων τῆς χώρας οὐκ ἔασοντας ἐπιβαίνειν, τεῖχος δὲ περιβαλοίμεθα, ὁ πρῶτον μὲν πρὸς ὑγίειαν ταῖς πόλεσιν οὐδαμῶς συμφέρει, πρὸς δὲ τινα μαλθακὴν ἔξιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν ἐνοικούντων εἴθε ποιεῖν, προκαλούμενον εἰς αὐτὸ καταφεύγοντας μὴ ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους. . . . ἀλλ’ εἰ δὴ τεῖχος γέ τι χρεὼν ἀνθρώποις εἶναι, τὰς οἰκοδομίας χρὴ τὰς τῶν ἰδίων οἰκήσεων οὕτως ἐξ ἀρχῆς βάλλεσθαι, ὅπως ἂν ἡ πᾶσα ἢ πόλις ἐν τείχῳ, ὁμαλότητί τε καὶ

ὁμοιότησιν εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς πασῶν τῶν οἰκήσεων ἐχουσῶν εὐέρκειαν[.] (Plato, *Laws* 778e–779a)

Concerning walls, O Megillus, I would agree with Sparta in letting the walls lie asleep in the earth and not rising up, and for the following reasons: To begin with, the phrase of the poets concerning them is rightly praised—that walls must be of bronze and iron rather than of wood. Second, in addition to this our cause would justly incur a great deal of ridicule, namely that every year the youth are to go out into the country to dig trenches and keep enemies at bay by erecting certain structures, so as not to allow them to enter within our borders, if we should then throw up a wall, which in the first place contributes nothing to the health of the cities, and in addition tends to render a state of softness in the souls of the inhabitants, inasmuch as it invites them to have recourse to it for shelter and not to defend themselves against their enemies. . . . But if men have some need of a wall, it is necessary that they build from the beginning the structures of their private dwellings in such a way that all the city becomes one wall, with all the dwellings having security through smoothness and likeness in the direction of the roads.

In each passage, we find that walls are inversely correlated with virtue: for the Thaumaturge, the walls of a house are a hindrance to the cultivation of personal virtue, as they are often used to hide wicked behavior. In the *Laws*, the walls of a city are incompatible with *public* virtue, as they are often used by the citizens to hide *themselves* from their enemies instead of meeting them in battle. We can point as well to the following lexical similarities:

<i>Leges</i> 778d–779b	<i>Vita Thaumaturgi</i> 44
[778d7–e1] τὰ τεῖχη μάλλον ἢ γῆναι . . . [778c6–7] τεῖχος δὲ περιβαλοίμεθα, ὁ πρῶτον μὲν πρὸς ὑγίειαν ταῖς πόλεσιν οὐδαμῶς συμφέρει	[lines 18–19] αἱ γὰρ τῶν γῆϊνων τοίχων περιβολαὶ τοῖς ἐν ἀρετῇ ζῶσι κέρδος οὐ φέρουσι
[779b1–3] τὰς οἰκοδομίας χρὴ τὰς τῶν ἰδίων οἰκήσεων . . . ὅπως ἂν ἡ πᾶσα ἢ πόλις ἐν τείχῳ	[14–16] εἰς οἶκος ὑμῖν ἔστω διὰ σπουδῆς ὁ ἐκάστου ἴδιος ὁ διὰ τῶν ἀρετῶν οἰκοδομούμενος
[779a8] τεῖχος γέ τι χρεὼν	[20] ἡ τῶν τοίχων χρεία

In the first of these complexes, the *Laws* recommends that bronze and iron walls (of weaponry) be built rather than “earthen walls.” A few lines later, it adds that “if we should erect a wall,” it is of no advantage to the health of the cities. All these motifs seem to be combined in the *Life*, where the “erections of earthen walls bring no profit” to those who live in virtue. Gregory’s κέρδος οὐ φέρουσι seems a nice rendering of Plato’s οὐδαμῶς συμφέρει, since the meaning of συμφέρω here is “to confer a benefit, to be useful or profitable.”⁴⁴

It is necessary to continue step-by-step through the second of these more involved complexes. In the *Laws* passage, we have a command that proceeds from an all-encompassing expression to a single unit: the entire city is to become a single wall. Also emphasized are the “structures” of people’s *own* houses. The situation is paralleled in the *Life*, where again we find a generalizing command proceeding from an all-encompassing expression to a single unit—each person (cf. “the entire city”) is to build for himself a single house (namely that of virtue)—and again there is an emphasis on how people’s *own* houses of virtue are to be “structured.”

Gregory rewrites Plato’s “legislation” on walls in order to demonstrate that his lawgiver is operating on a higher level of morality. Plato’s interest in walls and private homes has to do with the physical health of his citizens. The moral softness encouraged by walls is bad because it constitutes a risk to their security against external military threats. Gregory’s lawgiver legislates with an eye toward a different sort of security: that of his congregation’s souls.

We turn to a final pair of passages in which Gregory corrects the logic of the *Laws*. The passage from the *Life* concerns one of the miracles performed by the Thaumaturge (56–60). A group of villagers living next to the Lykos River were constantly threatened by its frequent floods. They sent to the Thaumaturge for aid, and he immediately set out for the village. After seeing the plight of the farmers, he prayed to God and set his traveling staff in the ground next to the river. The river obeyed, and thereafter flowed within the limits of its banks without flooding.

What is interesting here is the Thaumaturge’s arrival at this village, as well as the discussion of how God sets bounds upon and orders nature. In this

episode Gregory is responding to a famous passage at the beginning of the *Laws* regarding the relationship between God, humans, and nature. Consider first the description of the Thaumaturge’s journey:

Γενόμενος τοίνυν κατὰ τὸν τόπον (οὐδεὶς γὰρ ὄκνος αὐτῷ τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν σπουδὴν διεκώλυεν). οὔτε ὀχήματος, οὔτε ἵππων, οὔτε ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν διαγαγεῖν αὐτὸν δυναμένων προσδεθεῖς, ἀλλὰ βακτηρίᾳ τινὶ στηριζόμενος, πᾶσαν διήνυσεν τὴν ὁδὸν, καὶ ἅμα προσφιλοσοφῶν τοῖς τῆς ὁδοῦ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτῷ περὶ τῆς ὑψηλοτέρας ἐλπίδος, ἐν οἷς αἰεὶ κατὰ τὸ προηγούμενον διατρίβων, τὰ ἄλλα πάρεργα τῆς προτιμοτέρας ἐποιεῖτο σπουδῆς. (58.1–8)

And so he arrived at the location (for he had no hesitation that kept him from his zeal for the good). He required neither vehicle, nor horses, nor any other means of conveyance, but relying instead on a staff, he traversed all the road while philosophizing with those who shared his journey about their more lofty hope, all the while passing the time in accordance with his foremost object, and considering everything else secondary to his more important pursuit.

Gregory here is engaged with the opening passage of the *Laws*, where Cleinias of Crete and Megillus of Sparta fall in with the Athenian Stranger during their pilgrimage on foot to Knossos. The Athenian Stranger famously proposes that they spend their journey in discussion, namely on the institution of laws. In this way they will more happily “pass all the road” (τὴν ὁδὸν ἅπασαν διαπεράναι, 625b6–7); Gregory’s description of how the Thaumaturge “traversed all the road” (πᾶσαν διήνυσεν τὴν ὁδὸν) can be compared to this:

προσδοκῶ οὐκ ἂν ἀηδῶς περὶ τε πολιτείας τὰ νῦν καὶ νόμων τὴν διατριβήν, λέγοντάς τε καὶ ἀκούοντας ἅμα κατὰ τὴν πορείαν, ποιήσασθαι. (625a6–b1)

I expect that we would not unpleasantly make our discourse about the body politic and laws, both speaking and listening throughout the journey.

44 LSJ, s.v. συμφέρω II.

The word διατριβή, meaning “pastime” or “discussion,” is characteristic of Platonic dialogues,⁴⁵ and a few lines later the motif appears again:

καὶ λειμῶνες ἐν οἷσιν ἀναπαύομενοι διατρίβοιμεν
ἄν. (625c1–2)

Along the way there are also meadows where we could pass the time in relaxation.

Gregory is unmistakably striking the same note when he has the Thaumaturge “pass the time” (διατρίβων) of his journey in discussing philosophy (προσφιλοσοφῶν) with those who are sharing the journey with him. That the Thaumaturge “passed the time” and “traversed all the road” in such conversation, together with the speech he will deliver upon arriving at the village, direct our attention to the opening of the *Laws*.

As to the specific topic of conversation, the first lines of the *Laws* prominently set forth the agenda: God and the institution of laws.

Θεὸς ἢ τις ἀνθρώπων ὑμῖν, ὦ ξένοι, εἴληφε τὴν
αἰτίαν τῆς τῶν νόμων διαθέσεως; (624a1–2)

O Strangers, is it God or some human that is considered responsible for the institution of laws among you?

Gregory offers a rejoinder to the *Laws*’ meditation on whether man or god is responsible for the institution of laws. He has the Thaumaturge himself, upon arriving at the village, respond to the discussion of Plato’s three old pilgrims:

Οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνθρώπων, ἀδελφοί, τὸ διαλαμβάνειν
ὅροις τὴν τοῦ ὕδατος κίνησιν. Μόνης τῆς θείας
δυνάμεως ἔργον . . . ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ὁ Θεός ἐστιν
ὁ νομοθετῶν τοὺς ὅρους τοῖς ὕδασι, μόνος ἂν
ἐκεῖνος τῇ ἰδίᾳ δυνάμει καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τούτου
τὴν ἀταξίαν πεδήσειεν. (58.12–22)

It does not belong to humans, my brothers, to define the movement of water within limits. It

is the work of the divine power alone[;] . . . since it is God who sets the laws for waters, likewise only he through his own power could constrain the lawlessness of this river.

Here the Thaumaturge sets up a strong contrast between humans and God with respect to the question of who sets laws for nature. We can compare Gregory’s clear antithesis (Οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνθρώπων . . . ὁ Θεός ἐστιν ὁ νομοθετῶν) to the opening words of the *Laws*, when the Athenian Stranger asks “Was it God or some human . . . ?” (Θεὸς ἢ τις ἀνθρώπων). Likewise, Gregory treats precisely the same theme as that discussed by Plato’s three pilgrims, namely the institution of laws (cf. Gregory’s νομοθετῶν with Plato’s τῆς τῶν νόμων διαθέσεως . . . θέντος τοὺς νόμους, 624a1, 624b3).

Finally, this leaves us with the question of what Gregory’s audience would have thought of his use of Plato’s language here. I suggest that we can understand Gregory’s strategy as a response to Plato’s primary question: “God or Man?” The interlocutors in Plato’s dialogue respond to the question with a resounding “God,” but then immediately veer off and discuss the role of man in instituting laws. As we will see, Gregory seems to correct this discussion and reattribute the role of instituting laws to God.

One of the major motifs in the opening of the *Laws* is the lawgiver’s role in “ordering” society. The Athenian Stranger asks Cleinias of Crete about the origins of his country’s martial institutions:

Κατὰ τί τὰ συσσίτιά τε ὑμῖν **συντέταχεν** ὁ νόμος
καὶ τὰ γυμνάσια καὶ τὴν τῶν ὀπλῶν ἑξίν; (625c6–8)

By what principle has the law ordered your common messes and the gymnasias and the condition of your weaponry?

Cleinias replies that the topography of the Cretan landscape has dictated the way that their lawgiver instituted their customs for preparing for and waging war:

Καὶ πανθ’ ὁ **νομοθέτης**, ὥς γ’ ἐμοὶ φαίνεται, πρὸς
τοῦτο βλέπων **συνετάττετο**. (625c1–2)

And it seems to me at least that the lawgiver ordered everything with an eye to this in particular.

45 For the symbolic significance, within Plato’s dialogues, of Socrates’ διατριβή in the agora, see J. Doyle, “On the First Eight Lines of Plato’s *Gorgias*,” *CQ* 56, no. 2 (2006): 599–602.

According to Cleinias, what men call “peace” is only a fiction, and the natural state of human affairs is a never-ending war of all against all (625e6–626a3). It is in response to this basic condition of existence that the lawgiver has ordered all of Cretan society:

Καὶ σχεδὸν ἀνευρήσεις, οὕτω σκοπῶν, τὸν Κρητῶν νομοθέτην ὥς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον ἅπαντα δημοσίᾳ καὶ ἰδίᾳ τὰ νόμιμα ἡμῖν ἀποβλέπων συνετάξατο[.] (626a5–7)

And you if you look into the matter thus you will likely discover that the lawgiver of the Cretans ordered all our public and private laws with the purpose of war in mind.

We turn now to the Thaumaturge’s description of his divine lawgiver and how he imposes order on the world:

Μόνῳ τῷ Δεσπότῃ τῆς κτίσεως ἢ τῶν στοιχείων φύσις ἐστὶν ὑποχείριος, ἐν οἷς ἂν ταχθῇ τόποις, τούτοις εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς παραμένονσα. ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ὁ Θεός ἐστιν ὁ νομοθετῶν τοὺς ὅρους τοῖς ὕδασι, μόνος ἂν ἐκεῖνος τῇ ἰδίᾳ δυνάμει καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τούτου τὴν ἀταξίαν πεδήσειεν. (58.17–22)

To the Lord of creation alone is the nature of the elements obedient in abiding forever in whatever situation it has been arranged. Since it is God who sets the laws for waters, likewise only he through his own power could constrain the lawlessness of this river.

God the lawgiver (ὁ νομοθετῶν; cf. Plato’s τὸν Κρητῶν νομοθέτην) orders the elements of nature (ταχθῇ; cf. Plato’s συνετάττετο and συνετάξατο) and binds the disorder (ἀταξίαν) of the Lykos River. The note of setting order upon disorder is struck again a few lines later, when Gregory’s staff becomes “like a barrier and a check upon the disorder of the water” (Καθάπερ τι κλειθρον γενέσθαι καὶ κώλυμα τῆς τῶν ὑδάτων ἀταξίας, 59.9–10). Throughout this episode, it is God and God alone who can impose order on the landscape and set law upon nature. This worldview contrasts with that at the opening of the *Laws*, where divine lawgivers impose a martial system of laws on society in reaction to the demands of the landscape (625c9–e2). According to

Cleinias, the natural state of affairs is a perpetual war of all against all: “always and for everyone a constant war against all cities” (πόλεμος αἰεὶ πᾶσιν διὰ βίου συνεχῆς ἐστὶ πρὸς ἀπάσας τὰς πόλεις, 625e6–7). In Cleinias’s moral universe, the gods do not have the power to halt this war; they are merely invoked as the lawgivers whose institutions enable one society to prevail over another in this perpetual contest.

Gregory of Nyssa evokes a different sort of war and a different sort of divine lawgiver. Like the participants in Cleinias’s “war of all against all,” the inhabitants of the beleaguered village live in constant threat of attack. The enemy, however, is part of nature itself: a flood-prone river that is named “Wolf” because of the harm it does to the locals (Λύκος γὰρ διὰ τὸ βλαπτικὸς εἶναι τῶν προσοικούντων ἐπονομάζεται, 56.5–6). Like those suffering in Cleinias’s “constant, perpetual war” (πόλεμος αἰεὶ πᾶσιν διὰ βίου συνεχῆς), the villagers are threatened by the “constant dangers” (συνεχεῖς . . . κινδύνους, 56.15–16) that are caused by the river’s “incursions,” which occur at any time, night or day (ἄωρὶ τῶν νυκτῶν ἢ μεθ’ ἡμέραν πολλάκις τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῖς ἀγροῖς ἐπεμβαίνοντος, 56.17–18). But with Christ as his “ally” (σύμμαχον, 59.2), the Thaumaturge puts an end forever to the river’s ability to harm the local community (παντὶ τῷ ἐφεξῆς χρόνῳ, 61.12–13).

If Gregory of Nyssa was not only drawing on the opening of the *Laws* but in fact also actively responding to it, two points of contact seem likely. First, while Cleinias’s lawgivers shape society in response to nature, Gregory’s lawgiver has the power to impose laws on nature’s elements themselves. This is one way of reaffirming the superiority of Gregory’s God over Zeus and Apollo, whom Cleinias invokes as the lawgivers for Crete and Sparta, respectively (624a4–5). Second, the divine lawmakers of Cleinias’s world have no power to change the state of perpetual war of all against all. They can ready a society to prevail in the contest and to preserve its property against attack, but eternal war is the state of nature (αἰεὶ πόλεμον ἀκήρυκτον κατὰ φύσιν, 626a4–5). Gregory’s lawgiver, in contrast, can impose laws on nature and halt the incursions of the Lykos River forever.



This essay has shown how the *Life of Gregory the Thaumaturge* represents one of Gregory’s more involved

and allusively intricate meditations on the relationship between Christianity and the culture of pagan civilization, illuminating how the transition from one culture to the other is variously articulated in terms of appropriation, continuity, or correction. The Platonism of Gregory's work, especially with respect to his theology, is the subject of an enormous bibliography. But when considering Gregory's literary "statements" about the place of classical culture in Christian civilization, the scholarly conversation has been particularly interested in his use of the *Phaedo* to cast his sister Macrina as a Christian Socrates in his *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*.⁴⁶ His *Life of Gregory the Thaumaturge*, with its selective adaptation of themes from the *Laws*, should be integrated into this conversation. It is a different aspect of the Platonic tradition than we tend to encounter among the Cappadocians. Nevertheless it was to the *Laws* that Gregory turned when depicting the coming of Christian civilization to his family's homeland. At several key moments in the narrative—including the Thaumaturge's return as a holy man/theoros to Neocaesarea and his institution of martyr festivals—

Gregory reanimates corresponding passages from the *Laws*. His selective adaptation of Magnesia's proposed laws regarding the return of official theoroi from their travels abroad, together with his pivot to the model of Moses as mystical theoros, presents the Christian bishop as transcending older models of community leadership. Gregory's vision for the new civilization is on display in his "Platonization" of the rise and rationale of martyr festivals. It is Christian culture—especially as that culture's distilled essence is celebrated at festivals—that has the true claim to the classical inheritance. Finally, Gregory can have the Thaumaturge offer a rhetorical response to specific moments in the *Laws* in order to show how the Christian moral universe has improved upon the hierarchies of the classical worldview. Yet throughout the *Life*, we can surmise that it is Gregory of Nyssa himself who, through the artistry of his creation, asserts a dual claim. The first is to the legacy of classical literature, and the second is to the role of the Platonic lawgiver within his own fourth-century society.

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46 For earlier studies of classical allusions in Gregory's depictions of Macrina, see Muehlberger, "Salvage," 275 n. 7.

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